CALIDA RAWLES: AWAY WITH THE TIDES

March 19 to September 7, 2025

Gallery Guide

Calida Rawles, American, b. 1976, *Hallowed Be Her Name*, 2024, Pastel on paper, 38 × 52 in., Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Seoul, and London.

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ABOVE
Calida Rawles in her studio, 2023, Photo by Marten Elder
Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Seoul, and London.

RIGHT
To See What It Is, 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 84 × 48 in.,
Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin New York, Seoul, and London.

Take Care

Careful hands / Inside voices / Walking feet / Pencils only

Caregivers, please stay with your children.
Have fun, look closely, and ask questions about what you see!

About the Exhibition

For her first solo museum presentation, Rawles creates a bridge between her signature style and a part of Miami's history that is often ignored or obscured.

Rawles delves into the particular experience of Black people in Overtown, a Miami neighborhood that went from a thriving cultural and commercial hub to a neighborhood plagued by gentrification, systemic racism, and mass displacement.

The figures in Rawles's paintings are residents of Overtown, from young children to senior citizens. Rawles takes her practice a step further by photographing some of these participants in natural waters, at the historic Virginia Key Beach, which was once designated for Black people only. By photographing Black folks on the coastline, Rawles probes the Atlantic Ocean's history as the site of the exploitative transatlantic slave trade.

The works in this exhibition illuminate and celebrate the history, beauty, and resilience in the Overtown community, giving shape to an American experience that is often overlooked.

All exhibitions at the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art are underwritten by the MBMA Exhibition Fund.

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Anonymous, Gloria and Kenneth Boyland, Holly and Paul T. Combs, Deborah and Bob Craddock, Eleanor and William Halliday, Debi and Galen Havner, Sally Hergenrader, Jay and Kristen Keegan, the Doris S. and Hubert Kiersky Charitable Remainder Trust, Carl and Valerie Person, and Bill Townsend.

Be A Mirror

Choose one painting in the exhibition.

Can you mimic the pose and body language of the person in the painting?

Challenge a partner to do this with you!

How do you think it feels to float in the water?

Can you imagine you are floating here in the museum?

How does mirroring the painting help you understand it more?

How do you feel?

Memphis Swimming History

In the early 20th century, when the city was formally segregated, Black communities in Memphis enjoyed lively summer recreational sites, including swimming pools, in neighborhoods like Orange Mound and Douglass. These public spaces served as cultural and social centers and offered respite during hot summers. They hosted various activities, including swimming lessons, competitive sports, and bathing suit contests organized by park committees.

In 1963, the Supreme Court mandated the desegregation of Memphis public facilities, including pools. At this time, all city pools closed until the Fairgrounds Municipal Pool, originally for white residents, reopened to everyone in 1965. After integration, many Black Memphians avoided swimming in public pools where they continued to face racial discrimination, or resorted to unsafe natural water sources, leading to drownings. Meanwhile, wealthy white residents built private pools in the suburbs.

This history of restricted access has had a lasting legacy. According to a study by USA Swimming and the University of Memphis, 69% of Black Americans cannot swim. Organizations like Splash Mid-South, Grown Women Swim, and artist Calida Rawles promote water safety and the joys of swimming as an act of reclamation.

Ross, S., Irwin, C., Irwin, R., Martin, N., & Ryan, T. (2014). The development of swimming skills for African American youth: Parent and caregiver perceptions of barriers and motivations. International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education, 8 (3), 219-239. https://doi.org/10.1123/ijare.2013-0022

Memphis Swimming Timeline

1922 The City of Memphis opens a large pool on the fairgrounds for use only by the white residents of Memphis.

1914 Douglass Park opens as the first park designated for African Americans in Memphis. A pool was added in the 1920s.

1928 Orange Mound Park opens a pool in Orange Mound, the first subdivision in the US built by and for African Americans.

1930 White Memphians enjoy an array of newly constructed pools and man-made lakes for a small entry fee, including Clearpool and Rainbow Lake.

1960 Civil Rights activists carry out sit-ins at restaurants, libraries, pools, and public spaces across the City of Memphis to demand the end of Jim Crow segregation.

1960 Memphis transportation, libraries, zoo, and the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art announce desegregation.

1963 In the federal case of Watson v. Memphis, Black Memphians sue the City because city facilities such as libraries and pools were still segregated. The Supreme Court rules in favor of desegregation, and city-funded spaces are desegregated.

1965 The municipal pool at the Fairgrounds, which had been closed to Black Memphians since 1922, hosts an Integration Day where all are welcome to swim.

There are many different sizes of paintings in this exhibition.

How does the size of each painting affect your experience?

Towner for Life, 2024, Acrylic on canvas, 72 × 102 in., Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Seoul, and London.

Memphis Water Resources:

Use these resources to find ways that you can access swimming pools, swimming lessons, and splash pads for free or low cost. You can also use these links to support local organizations working to protect the important natural resource of water.

Access free swimming pools and splash pads across the city with **Memphis Parks**. Many community pools offer low cost swim lessons. Visit this link to find out which pool or splash pad is closest to you. *memphisparks.com/activity/aquatics*

Take in the mighty Mississippi River and learn about the story of Tom Lee at **Memphis River Parks**. River parks can be found all along the Mississippi River from Mud Island to Riverside Bayou. Access free playgrounds, basketball courts, and walking trails along the river. *memphisriverparks.org*

Surround yourself with nature on the walking paths along the Wolf River. **The Wolf River Conservancy** fights to protect natural ecosystems that contribute to the Memphis Sand Aquifer. *wolfriver.org/support*

Splash Mid-South offers low-cost or free swimming lessons to children between the ages of 6 and 12. Splash strives to teach water safety and emergency training to Memphis's Black and Hispanic/Latiné communities, as these youth are three times more likely to drown compared to their white counterparts. *splashmidsouth.org*

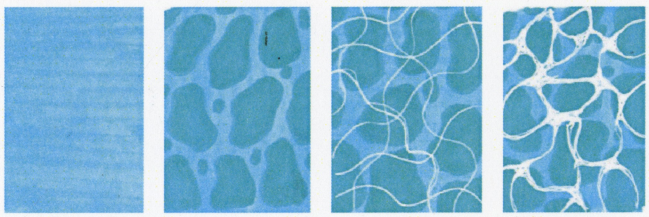
The Memphis Sand Aquifer produces the water supply of the Mid-South area, and **Protect Our Aquifer** is an important organization that protects Memphis's drinking water supply from pollution. *protectouraquifer.org/connect*

Grown Women Swim is a Black and female-owned business that offers swim classes to all women ages 16 and up. *grownwomenswim.company.site*

Drawing Water

Take this gallery guide home with you to practice your water-drawing skills! Use this method to mimic the appearance of pool water in the empty space below. You can use markers or paint; you'll need a light blue, a slightly darker blue, and a white shade.

1. Fill the background in with a light blue color.
2. Use the slightly darker blue to draw organic squiggly shapes.
3. Use the white to draw highlights on top. To do this, draw overlapping squiggly lines.
4. Round out and emphasize all the places where the white lines intersect.



If you could talk to one person in the painting, which person would you like to get to know?

Why?

Open in Overton Park

brooksmuseum.org

Memphis Brooks Museum of Art